Romanticism

Romanticism is a significant historical event that gave birth to new ideas and ways of feeling. It emerged in Western Europe in the mid-18th century and spread worldwide, challenging the modern world's industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and consumerism. This summary highlights key moments in the history of romanticism, including the emphasis on children's innocence, the rise of romantic heroes, the celebration of passionate love, the rejection of reason in favour of the irrational, the appreciation of nature over industry, the search for sublime experiences in nature, the nostalgia for the pre-industrial past, and the admiration for the idler and escapism to exotic lands.

Highlights

The romantic movement values the innocence and creativity of children.

Romantic heroes, like Chatterton, symbolize sensitivity and artistic rejection.

Romantic love prioritizes passion over practicality.

Romanticism challenges reason and embraces the power of the irrational.

Nature is favoured over industrialization in the romantic worldview.

The Middle Ages become a symbol of nobility in contrast to the modern world.

The idler represents playfulness and observation in bustling city life.

Escaping to exotic lands symbolizes a rejection of artificiality and convention.

Important works

The Marais, Paris, 1762.

The Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau publishes "Emile" or "On Education" in 1762, highlighting the child, the original rebel, the representative of everything that is pure, unschooled and outside of adult discipline as opposed to the rational and bureaucratic world of adults.

Brook Street, London, August, 1770.

Thomas Chatterton, a 17-year-old English poet, committed suicide in 1770 due to the rejection of his work by society, becoming a romantic symbol of artistic sensitivity in the face of a cruel world. His work is concerned with beauty and wisdom.

Romanticism borrows from Christianity. The romantic hero is a secularized Christ like figure. The loser who is in truth deeply noble in the eyes of the few who understand.

Leipzig, Germany, 1774

Goethe's "The Sorrows of Young Werther", published in 1774, portrays an impossible love story between a young poet called Werther and a beautiful clever married young woman called Charlotte. It exalts passionate feelings over rational concerns. Like Chatterton, Werther is under pressure to have a sensible career and join bourgeois life but he can think of only one thing: The impulses of his heart. Eventually Werther can't take it anymore and kills himself but rather than condemning him as a lunatic and a hothead, Goethe one of the founding fathers of Romanticism directs all our sympathies towards Werther.

Madrid, Spain, 1798.

Francisco de Goya, in 1798, creates "The Sleep of Reason Brings out Monsters", a work that illustrates the Romantic interest in the limits of reason and the power of the irrational over the human mind. To be romantic is to have sympathy for madness and to hold an almost vengeful attitude towards bombastic claims as to the triumph of rationality, science and logic.

William Wordsworth, English poet writes about nature, advocating the simple life and showing his aversion to industrialisation.

Thomas Cole, American painter, portrays Niagara Falls in 1829, highlighting the grandeur of nature and the Romantics' quest for the sublime.

Augustus Pugin, British architect, designs a new Parliament building in 1847 that evokes the Middle Ages and symbolises Romantic nostalgia for a noble, pre-industrial past.

Charles Baudelaire, French poet, exalts the flâneur, an urban stroller without specific occupations, as a romantic figure who withdraws from capitalist life and enjoys observing and narrating the city.

Modernism

Highlights

Modernism refers to a radical shift in aesthetic and cultural sensibilities in the early 20th century, marked by a break from Victorian morality and a pessimistic view of society.

Modernism was influenced by the development of industrialized societies, rapid urbanization, and the impact of two world wars, as well as gender, class, and race struggles.

The period of modernism was characterized by a loss of faith in God, government, and human goodness, leading to a focus on individual alienation and confusion.

Notable modernist authors include James Joyce, William Faulkner, Joseph Conrad, and Virginia Woolf, among others.

Modernist literature exhibited characteristics such as disruption of linear narrative, introspection, language exploration, symbolism, and the use of stream-of-consciousness and interior monologue techniques.

Stream-of-consciousness writing, exemplified by works like James Joyce's "Ulysses" and T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," captures the character's thought process through leaps of thought and lack of punctuation.

Naturalism

Naturalism emphasizes the harsh realities of existence and applies scientific principles.

Four main principles of naturalism: man's loneliness in an uncaring universe, nature's apathy, man's lack of control over forces, and man as an animal.

Themes in naturalism include survival, determination, indifference of nature, conflict, violence, and the influence of heredity and environment on individuals.

Naturalism in theatre

Naturalism is a stylistic movement in theatre that emphasizes portraying the real world without the influence of the playwright's opinions. It aims to present a slice of life on stage, including both important moments and mundane details. Naturalistic plays often highlight social injustices and feature characters from lower classes. While the movement was not popular for long in its original form, it has reappeared in many plays and influenced film-making.

Highlights

Naturalism is a theatre movement emphasizing the portrayal of the real world.

Plays should present a slice of life without the playwright's opinions.

Characters are often from lower classes, engaging with social injustices.

Naturalism has influenced the making of films.

Realism

Realism is a literary movement that emerged as a reaction to Romanticism in the 19th and early 20th centuries. It focuses on objective reality and portrays everyday life, particularly of the middle to lower classes, with a simplification of style and language.

Highlights

Realism is a literary movement that reacted against Romanticism and emphasized objective reality.

It had a widespread impact across the Western world.

Realism primarily found expression in novels, unlike Romanticism, which was prominent in poetry.

The movement focused on portraying everyday life, especially poverty and the middle to lower classes.

Realist works had well-developed and dynamic characters who played specific roles in the plot.

Realism's plots were slow-moving, depicting sequential actions and specific consequences.

The emphasis on details allowed plot points to build upon each other, without a major climax.

Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf, in her essay "A Room of One's Own," explores the tragedy of genius being restricted and the hidden histories of women writers. She highlights the impact of exclusion and inequality on the creation of great works of art. Woolf's writings delve into the subjective experiences of alienation and the contrast between inner and external existence. She was part of the Bloomsbury Group, a circle of creatives, and her work aligns with the features of Modernist writing. Woolf's novels, such as "Mrs. Dalloway," "To the Lighthouse," and "The Waves," employ techniques like interior monologue, stream of consciousness, and unconventional representations of time. She also challenges traditional notions of gender in her novel "Orlando." Woolf's own life ended tragically, but her work emphasizes the importance of understanding and expressing our inner lives.

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Woolf's work emphasizes the importance of understanding our inner lives and expressing them.

Her life ended tragically, but she expressed hope beyond suffering through deep thought and exploration in her writing.